

Congressman will attend White House ceremony to honor His Holiness' first papal visit to U.S.
April 15, 2008

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA) is honored to announce today that he will be joining President Bush and other members of Congress in welcoming His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the United States during an arrival ceremony at the White House on Wednesday, April 16.

"Being asked to welcome His Holiness to the U.S. on his first visit as pontiff is of special importance to me," Rep. Melancon said. "I had the great privilege of witnessing Pope Benedict's inaugural mass in Rome three years ago. As a person of faith representing in Congress many of my fellow Catholics in south Louisiana, I am thrilled to be a part of welcoming the leader of our church to the United States."

Pope Benedict XVI's arrival will mark the first time the pontiff has visited the United States since being elected pope in 2005. He will be received by President Bush, Catholic members of Congress and other officials during a South Lawn ceremony beginning at 10:30 a. m. tomorrow. A presidential dinner will be held in his honor that evening. The pope will offer mass to an expected 48,000 people in the newly completed Nationals Park on Thursday, winding up his three day visit to Washington. He will then travel to New York City to deliver speeches to the UN General Assembly and at St. Patrick's Cathedral before serving mass at Yankee Stadium on Sunday.

Congressman Melancon, a lifelong member of the Catholic Church, was part of a 21-member congressional delegation who attended Pope Benedict XVI's first mass as pope in Rome in 2005. At the time he called it "a lifetime experience" and something he was "very fortunate to get there and be a part of."

"Having grown up in the Catholic Church, I see the pope as the leading representative of my faith to the world," Rep. Melancon said. "I have been blessed to see him in person not once, but twice. Welcoming His Holiness to the capital of our great nation on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of faithful Catholics in south Louisiana is something I will never forget."

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